



3. March 2022

Choosing life is choosing God

Deut 30:15-20

'Look, today I am offering you life and prosperity, death and disaster. If you obey the commandments of Yahweh your God, which I am laying down for you today, if you love Yahweh your God and follow his ways, if you keep his commandments, his laws and his customs, you will live and grow numerous, and Yahweh your God will bless you in the country which you are about to enter and make your own. But if your heart turns away, if you refuse to listen, if you let yourself be drawn into worshipping other gods and serving them, I tell you today, you will most certainly perish; you will not live for long in the country which you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. Today, I call heaven and earth to witness against you: I am offering you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live, in the love of Yahweh your God, obeying his voice, holding fast to him; for in this your life consists, and on this depends the length of time that you stay in the country which Yahweh swore to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that he would give them.'

Choosing the commandments means choosing life; it means that God can bestow His grace on those who keep them and shower them with blessings.

In people today, a spirit of self-determination or independence often prevails, and sometimes it would seem that terms like 'obedience', 'submission' and 'humility' have become provocative words, which elicit immediate rejection. This spirit has even crept into our Church, and the deeper meaning of these words is often no longer understood. Perhaps there is a spectre in mind, confusing obedience with slavery; submission with the loss of one's honour; and humility with servility.

We may have had a bad experience with people or attitudes that abused these terms, using them in a demeaning way, but then it is all the more important that we discover their true meaning and beauty.

Today's biblical text shows us how important true obedience is. We are not required to obey blindly or militarily, but in deep understanding. God, who has called us to life, has set certain conditions so that this life can unfold in harmony; or, failing that, be destroyed. It is easy to realise that criminality, for example, is a failed life; a life at the expense of other human beings; a life in the midst of darkness; a life that can succumb more and more to the abyss, a life under constant threat and full of dangers... And the reason is logical: the basic conditions for a good life are not being fulfilled here!

The same applies to all of God's commandments: they are the basic conditions for true life. If we do not keep them and do not change our course, then we are constantly moving in a spiritual darkness, which can increase until it perverts our whole life.

So, by choosing the commandments, we are choosing life, as God intended it for us men. If we regard the commandments not as a limitation of our developmental possibilities, but as God's loving offer to us to know the true life, then we will obey with understanding. And it is not only a question of a full life in this world, but above all of attaining eternal life, as Jesus' answer to the rich young man shows us when he asked him: "*Master, what good deed must I do to possess eternal life?*" says the Lord, "*keep the commandments*" (Mt 19:16-17).

Although the words of today's reading are addressed specifically to the people of Israel, we can also interpret them in a spiritual sense.

If we keep God's commandments, understanding and fulfilling them not only in their literal content but also in their deeper meaning, thanks to the teachings of Jesus (e.g. cf. Mt 5:27-28), then we will be able to take possession of the "Promised Land". And this "Promised Land" will be, applying it to our reality, to possess true life. That is to say that God's blessing will be poured out on the earth of the soul, and its supernatural life will dwell in it and grow more and more. It is a life that begins here on earth and reaches its fullness in eternity. It is a life of blessing and bliss, for inner peace and joy enter our hearts. It is this earth that Jesus alludes to when He says: "*Blessed are the gentle: they shall have the earth as inheritance.*" (Mt 5:4)

We see, then, that obedience means listening to the truth and submitting to it in humility. Refusing to obey the truth that God shows us, on the other hand, will have obvious consequences: the inherited land will be ruined and one will not be able to live on it for long. God's life dies and its splendour disappears. Life grows dull and dark....

We can choose life! It is our choice! If we choose it, the promise of the Lord will be fulfilled for us: "*Choose life, then, so that you and your descendants may live, in the love of Yahweh your God, obeying his voice, holding fast to him; for in this your life consists*".

Choosing life by opting for God's commandments means, in concrete terms, choosing God Himself. This is what God proposed to the people of Israel, and this is what He still proposes to us today!